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THE FIRST EDITION OF "HAIL COLUMBIA"!

BY O. G. SONNECK.

IN the April 1910 number of the PENNSYLVANIA MAGAZINE OF HISTORY AND BIOGRAPHY Mr. Charles Henry Hart had an article called "Hail Columbia and its First Publication. A critical inquiry." It was followed in the January, 1912 number by a supplemental note, headed "The First Edition of Hail Columbia."

Mr. Hart's critical inquiry was prompted by the statement in my essay on the history of "Hail Columbia" that "no copy of this original edition of 'Hail Columbia' has come to light" *i.e.* of the edition advertised in *Porcupine's Gazette*, Phila., Friday, April 27, 1798 as to be published on the following Monday, April 30, at B. Carr's Musical Repository, "ornamented with a very elegant Portrait of the President."

John Adams was then President and quite naturally I inferred that Carr was to publish the "New Federal Song," as Joseph Hopkinson's text of "Hail Columbia" adapted to Philip Phile's President's March originally was called, with the portrait of John Adams. Mr. Hart, however, adduced strong evidence that it was Carr who, though without his imprint, published "The Favorite New Federal Song Adapted to the President's March" not with the portrait of John Adams but with an oval profile to left bust portrait by an unknown etcher after Joseph Wright with inscription on ribbon beneath bust "G. Washington." The portrait is not engraved on the plate but is a separate print mounted in the blank center-space of the title and above the curved and engraved quotation of the first line of fourth stanza in Jos. Hopkinson's poem, "Behold the Chief who now Commands." Mr. Hart also drew at-

tention to the fact that the same portrait (of course, without the quotation) had been used in December 1797 for "The Battle of Trenton, A Sonata" and was used again in 1798 for the song "New Yankee Doodle," both pieces issued with the joint imprint of J. Hewitt, New York, and B. Carr, Philadelphia. Mr. Hart held that the edition of the "New Federal Song" with the Washington portrait and the quotation was the first and earlier than one with engraved American eagle in place of mounted portrait and quotation which edition Mr. Louis C. Elson, the owner of a supposedly unique copy in turn had claimed to be the first edition of "Hail Columbia."

To Mr. Hart's findings I wish to add some remarks which occurred to me after the Library of Congress, too, had acquired a copy of the American eagle issue.

Mr. Hart identified the oval portrait used as number 157 in his Catalogue of the Engraved Portraits of Washington. Inasmuch as this number 157 shows "over head, to left, a female Victory. . . On extreme left, a whole-length figure of Goddess of Liberty. . . At base, drum with Eagle. . .", the oval portrait must have been secured by utilizing the whole print number 157 only in part. That this was the procedure appears from the same portrait as mounted on our copy of "New Yankee Doodle": it plainly shows traces of the paraphernalia enumerated above.

Comparison of our American Eagle issue with the practically exact size facsimile of the portrait issue of "The Favorite New Federal Song" in Mr. Hart's article discloses further facts.

1. *The music plates used in both issues are identical in every respect, inclusive of distance-measurements of the lettering in the title but exclusive of course of the American eagle. With this exception the copies of the song extant represent impressions from the same plates.*

2. When mounting the oval portrait in the blank space left between the words "New/Song" and "Adapted/President's" and above the words "Behold the Chief," etc., in the title it became necessary to let the portrait protrude as much as one centimeter on the music sheet beyond the impression of the upper margin of the music plate. (This is the simple explanation of a puzzle which will mystify all who fail—as I did for some time—to notice that the impression of the upper plate margin is visible even in Mr. Hart's facsimile. Unless one notices this marginal impression one may easily be led to argue that the distance-measurements in the title in both issues of the song are different, that two different plates were used and that therefore the two issues represent two different editions.)

3. Examination of our copy of the issue of "The Favorite New Federal Song," with the engraved American eagle with clouds broken by sunrays in the background, by Prof. Rich. A. Rice of the Prints Division of the Library of Congress, convinced him that the American eagle, etc., was engraved after the surrounding words had been engraved, principally for the reason that a few of the cloud lines clearly run through the line of flourish of the word "Adapted" in the title. This in itself, of course, does not argue that the American eagle was added to the plate later on for a second issue of the song but it does argue this: if the American eagle had been engraved on the plate at the time the song was first published—thereby establishing the issue with the American eagle as the first and earlier than the one with the Washington portrait—then its later erasure from the plate to make place in a later issue for a substituted mounted portrait of George Washington would have left visible traces even in a facsimile. Since no such traces appear Prof. Rice agrees with me that the American eagle did not origi-

nally form part of the plate, that the space was left vacant and that the American eagle was added noticeably later, carefully utilizing the available space for the design but with the *lapsus stili* noted above.

Against all this might be adduced the fact that Carr advertised the piece in *Porcupine's Gazette* for Friday, April 27, 1798 as "On Monday afternoon will be published" and in *Claypoole's American Daily Advertiser* for Wednesday, May 2, 1798 as "just published" ". . . ornamented with a very elegant portrait of the President." The President was then John Adams. This fact would call for *his* portrait, not that of George Washington. No copy of "The Favorite New Federal Song" with the portrait of John Adams has come to light, whereas Mr. Hart has shown that the song exists with the portrait of George Washington mounted above the engraved words "Behold the chief who now commands." This is a quotation from the fourth and last stanza of Jos. Hopkinson's poem and the stanza runs:

Behold the Chief who now commands
Once more to serve his country stands
The rock on which the storm will beat
The rock on which the storm will beat
But arm'd in virtue firm and true
His hopes are fix'd on Heav'n and you
When hope was sinking in dismay
And clouds obscur'd Columbia's day
His steady mind from changes free
Resolved on Death or Liberty
Firm, United, let us be, etc.

Lines second to end would have no meaning unless they refer to George Washington. They would seem to imply that also the first line refers to George Washington. Now, in April and May 1798 President John Adams was *ex officio* the Commander-in-Chief of the American forces, not George Washington. The latter was not nominated Commander-in-Chief by John Adams until July 2, 1798. (The nomination was confirmed by the Senate on July 3.) Consequently, so

the argument would probably continue, July 2 or 3, 1798, would be the earliest possible date of issue of "The Favorite New Federal Song" with the words "Behold the Chief who now commands" joined to a portrait of George Washington.

And this is about as far as an attempted argument in favor of the priority of the American eagle issue as the first issue of "Hail Columbia" would get in this direction. It is blocked by the fact that Joseph Hopkinson wrote the line "Behold the Chief," etc., in April, 1798, when it could have applied only to John Adams and by the counter-argument that, for the reasons stated above, the issue without the American eagle is prior to one with the eagle. Therefore the argument would prove only that the issue with the portrait of George Washington was not published before July 3, 1798, that the issue with the American eagle instead of the portrait was published still later, and that—inasmuch as the song was published by May 2, 1798, with "a very elegant portrait of the President"—*both these issues were preceded by one with the portrait of John Adams*, of which issue no copy has come to light!

Into this curious dilemma those are driven who, like Mr. Hart, interpret the line "Behold the Chief who now commands" as addressed by Joseph Hopkinson to George Washington. With this anachronistic interpretation Mr. Hart and others are ungracious enough to credit Judge Hopkinson with a rather poor knowledge of the Constitutional prerogatives of the Presidents of the United States. However, Mr. Hart is mistaken if he seems to think that the first two lines of the fourth stanza are applicable to George Washington only. His quotation

Behold the Chief, *who now Commands*
Once more to serve his country stands

without the third ("The rock on which the storm will beat") is faulty and forced; it leaves the third line

dropped off in mid-air. Furthermore, we know from contemporary evidence—*Aurora*, April 27, 1798—that the Anti-Federalists looked on the song (which Jos. Hopkinson had intended as a non-partisan song) as “the vilest adulation to the anglo-monarchical party and the two Presidents,” *i.e.* the only two our country had so far had, George Washington and John Adams. Now Hopkinson’s first two stanzas (“Hail Columbia—happy land” and “Immortal patriots, rise once more”) are wholly impersonal. The third (“Sound, sound the trump of Fame / Let Washington’s great name”) deals with the first President. That leaves only the fourth stanza for John Adams, if the impression of vilest adulation of *two* Presidents could be created. It is but necessary to read this extract from an editorial report in *Porcupine’s Gazette*, April 28, 1798, on the political enthusiasm created by Mr. Fox’s singing of “Hail Columbia” on April 27, at the New Theatre as it had on occasion of the *première* of the song on April 25 and to combine with it the editorial political remarks about the President’s recent letter to Congress to know that indeed at least the first line of the fourth stanza was considered a direct reference to John Adams:

“but no sooner were the words

Behold the Chief who now commands,

pronounced, than the house shook to its very centre; the song and the whole were drowned in the enthusiastic peals of applause, and were obliged to stop and begin again and again, in order to gain a hearing.”

That Jos. Hopkinson referred with that line to the only “Chief” of whom he could possibly say in April 1798 “who *now* commands,” namely John Adams, must be clear from all this internal and external evidence. But Gilbert Fox, to whose lot it fell to “create” on April 25, 1798 “Hail Columbia” as the French would say, must

have been also the first interpreter to query the *address* of all the other lines in the last stanza. Did they, too, refer to John Adams or do they with the second line "Once more to serve his Country stands" suddenly turn back to George Washington, just as if the author in his flights of fancy had tried in vain to emerge for more than a few seconds from under the shadow of the first President?

Hopkinson's commas in his autograph text at the Pennsylvania Historical Society afford us little help:

Behold the Chief, who now commands,
Once more to serve his country stands,
The rock on which the Storm will beat.

Porcupine's Gazette, the first newspaper to print the poem (in the issue for April 28, 1798) improved on this feeble interpunctuation, though not settling the case of Adams *versus* Washington:

Behold the Chief who now commands,
Once more to serve his country, stands
The Rock on which the Storm will beat

I realize that the normal interpretation of lines second and third, especially with *Porcupine's* interpunctuation, would be "George Washington who stands ready once more to serve his country as the rock," etc. Yet I believe that it is not the interpretation desired by Joseph Hopkinson. I suspect that it is merely the case of a very minor poet endeavoring to cram too much historical and patriotic symbolism into a few lines without the power of unequivocal, contrasting statement.

It is inconceivable that a man like Joseph Hopkinson can have referred to any but the actual President as "the Chief who now commands." It is equally inconceivable that, after having devoted one whole stanza, the third, to George Washington, he should have turned by way of poetic contrast to John Adams only to the

extent of one line and have succumbed to "Washington's great name" again for the rest of the poem. Hence, we may feel morally certain that the *plan* of his *whole* last stanza was a reference to President John Adams. This conclusion in nowise interferes with the fact that the plan miscarried by way of misleading phraseology, mixed metaphors, etc., with the result that without further analysis and without remembering the constitutional prerogatives of a President, in matters military, almost any reader would see in the fourth stanza a direct reference to George Washington. Perhaps Hopkinson's idea was (with a modicum of that poetic license which disregards chronology) to symbolize in the abstract and impersonally the President of the United States as ready to serve his country again as the rock, etc. Perhaps unconsciously he voiced an anticipation that John Adams would step aside in favor of George Washington as the Commander-in-Chief of our military forces. Perhaps the association of "The President's March" with its memories of George Washington exercised too much pressure on his mind. Whatever the cause, the threads of imagination of our poet became twisted and by using the words "*once more* to serve his country" he inevitably switched the attention of the reader from the *de facto* "Chief" John Adams to George Washington.

And Benjamin Carr, the first publisher of "The Favorite New Federal Song" that within a few days became known as "Hail Columbia"? Who can tell why a music publisher (of the eighteenth century, of course) did this or that? When he advertised the song with a portrait of the President, he knew full well that John Adams was the President and not George Washington. But perhaps no suitable engraved portrait of John Adams was available to him for his purposes; perhaps he really held the erroneous belief (pardonable enough in a music publisher comparatively

"lately from London") that George Washington was still the Commander-in-Chief of the American forces and ready to serve his country against France as he had against England; perhaps it was a better business proposition after all to twist the facts a little and to sell the song with a picture of George Washington rather than that of John Adams; perhaps—but enough of conjectures. The unalterable fact is, whatever its explanation, that B. Carr published "The Favorite New Federal Song" with a portrait of George Washington and the quotation "Behold the Chief who now commands."

To sum up, the history of the first edition of "Hail Columbia" would appear to be this: Joseph Hopkinson wrote it in April 1798 as a non-partisan song for the benefit of Gilbert Fox who sang it at the New Theatre, Philadelphia, for the first time on April 25, 1798. It was advertised as to be published on April 30, 1798 and on May 2, 1798 was advertised as published in Philadelphia at the Musical Repository of B. Carr. It was published, though without Carr's imprint, as "The favorite new Federal Song Adapted to the President's March" composed by Philip Phile. The engraver of the music plates so spaced the title as to leave space in the center for the insertion of "a very elegant portrait of the President" as advertised by Carr. Instead of John Adams' portrait, however, a profile to left bust portrait of George Washington engraved after Joseph Wright appears to have been used. It was mounted above the engraved quotation from Hopkinson's text "Behold the Chief who now commands." Either because his supply of prints was not equal to the demand for the "favorite" song or because he wished to rectify his mistake in calling Washington the "Chief" or because of some other reason B. Carr appears to have substituted sometime later (probably in 1798) on the same plate for the mounted

portrait of George Washington and the quotation from Hopkinson's text the design of an American eagle with American shield in beak and clouds in the background broken by sunrays neatly engraved in the available space in the center of the title. This, then, would be the second issue of the first edition; whereas the issue with the Washington portrait would be the first issue of the first edition, *unless, after all, a genuine copy of "The favorite new Federal Song" should be discovered not with George Washington's portrait but with that of John Adams*, as Carr's advertisements would imply. In that case the issue with Adams' portrait would be the first and its date would be April 30 or May 1, 1798. The issue with George Washington's portrait would then be the second and the line "Behold the Chief who now commands" would point to July 3, 1798, the date of Washington's appointment as Commander-in-Chief in the threatened war with France, as the earliest date of publication and the issue with the substituted American eagle would be the third, though probably still of the year 1798.